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It is Time for the Younger Generation of Australian politicians and the Government, for the Sake of Justice, Democracy and Morality, to Say No to the Soeharto Regime's Invasion of East Timor

Thoughts about the ALP political policy

by
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As usual, in the lead up to a general election, the participating political candidates make high-sounding promises to the people. It's no different to a traditional market where traders promote their wares, and slash the prices to attract buyers. This time the ALP has delivered some fairly interesting policy, though it is not significant to people's lives. Laurie Brereton, the shadow ALP Foreign Minister said in a press conference on Monday, 15 September that the issue of human rights would be the ALP's diplomatic key and they would make the East Timor problem one of their main areas of priority together with Burma and some other issues. "The controversy in the events of East Timor have come at a very considerable moral price for Australia. Along the way in the past 24 years, the people of East Timor have suffered immensely", he said in a press release, broadcast on ABC radio at 3.15 p.m Darwin time and in The Age on 16 September 1998.

East Timorese who live overseas, specially in Australia where they have had bad experiences at the hands of the ALP, have every right to feel pessimistic about this statement. Apart from this statement being a sugar-coated promise to attract voters, it was an interesting political statement for me. There are several reasons for this. First, Laurie Brereton, though a long time player on the Australian political stage, can be regarded as a politician of the younger generation. What is interesting is the change in political policy towards East Timor by the younger generation of Australian politicians. It feels as if there is a breath of fresh air in East Timor policy. Second, this change in policy is the realisation of a moral obligation. It seems that the younger generation is introducing ethical values into the East Timor affair, something which, as far I can remember, has never been done before.

So, this political attitude is for me, a young East Timorese, the first step in a new round in Australian governmental policy towards East Timor. Why? Look at Australian history both past and present. First, as everyone knows, Indonesia undertook a massive military invasion of East Timor, and forced the local people to integrate into Indonesia, with much Indonesian military brutality. The international community and the UN called it illegal occupation. What was Australia's attitude? Second, Australia is a member of the UN and has put its name to a number of international conventions. It is also a long established democratic country. This being their direction, what did Australia do in relation to the massive military invasion by the Soeharto regime?

The history of the past 23 years has shown that democratic Australia has given very strong support to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, although it knew that this was an illegal occupation. Australia's attitude has not changed for 23 years. What "virus" has struck Australia's consciousness, as if the nation's conscience has been blunted, its feeling resticted, its soul numbed. They are happy to see East Timorese every day captured, beaten, ill-treated, burnt, electrocuted, have the nails extracted, raped, and killed one by one, even en masse.

Australia is the closest country to East Timor, so there is no reason for their not knowing about this.

The Australian government, to save face for the Soeharto regime and for the sake of their own economic interests, fanatically supported the cruellest regime of our time, which has systematically wiped out East Timorese society and the people's cultural identity. From the beginning, the attitude of the UN has been to pass resolutions demanding the withdrawal of the fascist Soeharto's troops. There have been hundreds of books and thousands of articles immortalising the bravery of the East Timorese struggling for justice, but they have paid dearly, with the blood of over 200,000 martyrs. A number of countries in all parts of the world have not acknowledged the occupation of the despicable Soeharto regime, expressing their point individually by direct and indirect means. But strangely Australia, East Timor's close neighbour, closed its eyes and ears to the brutality, and locked away its conscience in the face of the moral evil of the Soeharto regime. In fact it was as if they were shouting; "Come on Soeharto, keep advancing, we are behind you. Don't withdraw. Kill to your heart's content, and wipe out any East Timorese who oppose you".

These words can presumably by justified by Australia's very single-minded commitment to exploring the natural wealth of East Timor, alongside the fascist Soeharto government, although Portugal, the East Timorese people overseas, and the international solidarity movement demanded an end to these illegal and immoral actions. So, in one sense, Indonesia and Australia can be compared to two crooks who grab some property and kill the owner, then happily divide the spoils, without feeling anything. Although other people around know that they are making use of the spoils, they are completely indifferent. They are content with what they have done. When their wives, children or relations chide them, they calm them down in various ways, or even punish them. Indonesia has done this to its own people, such as our friend George Aditjondro, who was forced to escape to safety in another country, and other young Indonesians. The same thing happened recently when the two governments jointly discussed the deportation of an Australian, the BHP Chief Executive Officer in Indonesia, who tried on his own initiative to make contact with our leader, Xanana Gusmão, to discuss the issue of the seizure of East Timor's natural resources.

While Indonesia is lying through its teeth to convince its own people and the international community that the majority of East Timorese want integration with Indonesia, Australia has been just as busy in strengthening their relationship wth Indonesia, using various simple strategies, which even non-political people such as I can see, like not allowing East Timorese people to enter the Australian embassy in Jakarta. East Timorese are allowed to enter any other embassy, but the Australian embassy – no way. To demonstrate their loyalty to Indonesia, Australia has erected a wall around its embassy which is even higher than before; indeed it is the highest embassy wall in Jakarta.

When asked why Australia discriminated against East Timorese by preventing their entering the Australian embassy whilst other people were allowed in, the Australian ambassador simply answered: "This is policy from Canberra". When pursued further as to why this policy had been adopted, he answered cynically and arrogantly: "It is your own fault. Why do your friends ask for political asylum here? We don't want to be bothered". One can imagine from this how low a price is given to the life of an East Timorese, by Indonesia and Australia. When East Timorese people try to maintain their most basic rights, either clandestinely, semi-secretly, or quite openly, they are chased all over by the Indonesian military and tortured, ill-treated, have their nails pulled out and are murdered. In the face of such a situation, there are only two choices – be killed or escape to safety. So for East Timorese who want to escape to safety, one of the choices is foreign embassies. But it seems that Australia is happier seeing East Timorese captured, tortured and killed by the Indonesian armed forces, than to see their lives saved. This is the least that can be concluded from the responses of the embassy staff and

the ambassador himself, Mr John McCarthy, and from their policy of locking the embassy to East Timorese and from their political policies.

After this experience I then recalled the complaints and cries of East Timorese which were never heard by their Australian neighbours. "Australia, Australia, what have we done wrong that you treat us like this? Don't you remember days gone by, when you were having problems in World War II, that because of our hiding you and saving you from the evil hand of the Japanese, tens of thousands of our forebears were tortured and killed? We did all this only because we wanted to save you, but what have we done wrong that you go as far as treating us like this? Handing us over to the cruel hands of the Soeharto regime, taking our wealth, not allowing us to seek safety in your embassy, so what have we done? Are you not satisfied yet with the lives which we gave for you, when we saved you from the Japanese, so that you must now hand us over to a criminal who is as cruel as Hitler? What was wrong with our saving you in World War II? Australia, Australia, do you still have a conscience? If so, wake up, stand up and walk alongside us. We do not need anything from you, only your appreciation of universal values which all men have, namely that we have the same right as your people to establish democracy in our homeland and to live in peace and harmony. We need nothing from you except an appreciation of the meaning of humanitarianism which both you and we possess. Just that. Full stop".

This plea seems to have opened up the horizons of young Australians, and those of political policies which have emerged in particular political circles, such as the ALP. In spite of my negative presumptions, I consider this to be a new step for young Australians, that they struggle for universal humanitarian values. The Australian government can no longer run away from the claims of history and the demands of time. The history of justice is on our side. It only remains to wait for the moment when justice reveals itself.

Now the time has come for the Australian government to listen to the complaints, cries and screams of the powerless East Timorese people. The time is now here for the Australian government to see the cruelty, and the effects of the cruelty, which have been brought about by the Indonesian military invasion. It's time for the Australian government to open itself to universal humanitarian values, and become conscious of the moral values which Australia has struggled for over the years in the exercise of democracy.

In my capacity as a representative of East Timorese students and the East Timor Youth Organisation, and especially as one of the powerless people who have experienced the brutality of the Indonesian invasion, I call upon the younger generation of Australians, on the government of Australia and specially on the ALP, to save your country from Australia's leaders, who have consciously supported, both directly and indirectly, the brutality and viciousness of the Indonesian government in East Timor.

Of course, Australian friends and supporters of the ALP, you do not all want to be called an insensitive, inhumane and fascist-supporting country. You do not want your country in future to be branded as an immoral country, because at the moment you are supporting a very brutal fascist regime in Asia. So now is the time for you to take moral steps to prevent this stain growing bigger in the history of your nation. Of course it is already late in the day, but not too late to put right. Now is the time for Australia to stand with us and our supporters in Australia and other parts of the world, and say NO to the Soeharto regime's occupation of our homeland.

We know that the ALP, when in power, supported the Soeharto regime. But that was in the past. We are convinced that justice will come, and we are ready to bury the past. Let us move ahead and look to the future, making the past part of our common history, and a base to establish a foothold for us to move forward to build a world which respects universal values of

humanity, values of morality, and values of justice, a justice such as was fought for by Australia through its struggle for democracy.

Welcoming the future, we the youth of East Timor, are behind the statement made by the highest leader of the East Timorese resistance, Xanana Gusmão, as he wrote for a seminar held by the University of Auckland on September 9-10 1998, that the future of the East Timor nation will be as a neighbourly country which focuses its friendship on the region, and submits applications for membership with ASEAN and the South Pacific Forum. There will be a special link with democratic New Zealand and Australia, and with Portuguese-speaking countries. East Timor will be a multi-party democratic country. East Timor will be a country which promotes peace, by not possessing armed forces, and by prohibiting the use of firearms in the territory. East Timor will be a developing country which is active in exploiting its natural resources. East Timor will be a country which looks after its people and listens to their voice. The history of justice is on our side and time is with us. So for young Australians who later will hold positions in future governments, there is no longer any reason for you to keep putting off the time, no reason for you, as a democratic nation, to support a regime which is clearly repugnant, no reason for you to go on closing the door of your embassy to those who seek safety for their lives, no reason for you go on locking up your desire for morality and justice. Now is the time for you to act morally to uphold democracy, and join with us in fighting for universal humanitarian values, and defend our most basic right of justice, democracy, peace and love. So the political policies and moral demands as explained by the ALP are a beginning in the demand for consistency from the young generation of Australia. Your democratic values are at stake in our struggle. A democratic country can only be said to be democratic, if universal humanitarian values, as they exist in the spirit of democracy, are observed.

Greetings of The Struggle from your suffering neighbour
Happy general election.
We await the result.

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